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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 006342

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INL/LP, WHA/AND

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [CO](#) [SENV](#) [KCRM](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: GOC SEEKS MORE ERADICATION, FUNDS OWN SPRAY OPERATION

REF: BOGOTA 00602

1. (SBU) Summary: President Uribe has responded to estimates that coca cultivation is on the rise in Colombia by pressing the GOC and the United States to substantially increase bilateral eradication efforts. After intensive meetings to discuss eradication, Ambassador Wood and Minister of Defense Ospina agreed June 27 on several methods of increasing coca spraying and jointly pledged to raise 2006 coca spray goals by almost 25 percent to 160,000 hectares. The GOC has demonstrated its commitment to increase spraying by pledging USD 4.5 million for its own spray operation. Please see the action request in paragraph 11. End summary.

More Eradication Needed, Says GOC

2. (C) Ambassador Wood was called to two meetings (June 20 and 27) with Minister of Defense (MOD) Camilo Alfonso Ospina Bernal to discuss ways to increase aerial eradication of coca in 2006. In the first meeting, MOD Ospina urged more coca spraying, explaining that he was acting under presidential orders and in response to the June 20 release of 2005 UN/GOC figures estimating that coca cultivation had increased by 10 percent from 2004.

3. (SBU) The Embassy spent the week in between the two meetings evaluating proposals to increase spraying in the short term. An initial focus was on ways to reduce the 50 percent of planned missions that are cancelled due to adverse weather conditions, but deeper analysis showed that alteration of the GOC's Environmental Management Plan for Aerial Eradication is not possible without potentially serious undesirable side effects such as increased impacts on spray planes or an increase in collateral environmental damage. An Embassy team then studied other possible changes in spray operations that could result in the eradication of an increased number of hectares of coca.

4. (C) The Ambassador renewed the discussion with the MOD and his military staff on June 27 with the following proposals to increase coca spraying:

A) If the GOC assumes responsibility for opium poppy via manual eradication, the T-65 spray aircraft could be reprogrammed to go after coca alone. This would gain the program an estimated 12,000 hectares of sprayed coca during the six months left in 2006.

B) If GOC policymakers respect the bilateral spray plan and do not order adjustments for political reasons, spray packages will maximize efficiency and spray more coca. This would "save" the program some 18,000 hectares that were lost in late 2005 when the AT-802 spray package was sent prematurely in November to Narino, where predictably inclement weather grounded spray aircraft for 50 days through the end of the year.

C) If the GOC were to eliminate restrictions against spraying in indigenous reserves, national parks, and along the Ecuador border, this would open up new areas of dense, highly-productive coca to spraying, increasing spray productivity and removing more potential cocaine from the market by eradication. CNC has not estimated total coca cultivation in indigenous reserves, national parks, and the 10 kilometer buffer zone along the Ecuador border, but the Colombian National Police (CNP) estimates that these areas contain 7,350 (indigenous), 8,375 (parks), and 6,000 (border) hectares of coca.

5. (C) At the June 27 meeting, the MOD agreed that the GOC would tackle opium poppy eradication manually and that the GOC would limit politically-motivated adjustments to the spray plan. He also pledged to work with the GOC Minister of Interior and Justice Sabas Pretelt to determine the status of eradication in protected areas (i.e., indigenous areas, national parks, and the border) and to facilitate law enforcement activity (spraying) throughout Colombian soil.

6. (C) In return, by mutual agreement, the 2006 coca spray goal was increased by 30,000 hectares to a total of 160,000 hectares.

GOC Launches Own Spray Operation

17. (SBU) Concurrent with the above meetings, the Embassy was informed on June 22 by General Jorge Baron, head of the CNP,s Anti-narcotics Directorate, that President Uribe has ordered the Ministry of Treasury to allocate some USD 4.5 million for the purchase of spray planes. General Baron reported that he had already gotten preliminary proposals from several companies on lease-purchase plans for AT-402, AT-602, and T-65 spray planes. A formal GOC solicitation process for spray planes will be launched in the near future, once terms of reference are worked out. General Baron estimated that it would take at least three to four months before the required GOC bidding process can be completed.

18. (SBU) The GOC funding is only sufficient to cover the lease-purchase of the spray planes (although the proposed packages also include pilots who will train GOC spray pilots). General Baron requested USG assistance in purchasing the chemicals used in the aerial eradication program (while details are too preliminary to make an accurate estimate, a four-plane operation would probably use around USD 4 million in chemicals per year). Many other issues in regards to the GOC spray operation remain - security helicopters to accompany the GOC spray planes; supporting ground personnel; additional forward operating locations; and required navigational and tracking equipment for the spray planes.

Moving Forward

19. (SBU) Opium Poppy: Ambassador Wood has already sent the MOD a letter requesting a commitment in writing to give priority to the manual eradication of opium poppy. The Embassy has offered planning, logistical, and equipment support for manual poppy eradication and is awaiting a formal GOC plan, which is forthcoming. At the same time, NAS is working with the CNP to revise the annual spray plan to redirect the T-65,s to full time coca eradication.

110. (SBU) Indigenous Reserves ("Resguardos"): The CNP received, following the June 27 meeting, a resolution signed by the National Council of Dangerous Drugs Director/Minister of Interior and Justice Sabas Pretelt. The resolution grants authority to spray in three resguardos. The resolution became official July 10 after its approval by the National Council of Dangerous Drugs and is the first movement forward in getting permission to spray in the "protected" areas since 2005.

Action Requested:

111. (U) For INL/A: The Embassy urgently needs a per hectare estimate for how much each hectare over the 130,000 contracted amount will cost. That is, now that the Embassy has raised its goal from 130,000 to 160,000 hectares for the first contract year (see reftel), how much will the additional 30,000 hectares cost the USG?

112. (SBU) Comment. Ever since the publication of the CNC coca cultivation estimate in March 2006, various GOC officials have been saying, in private and in public, that the GOC remains committed to eradication and in fact wishes to redouble its eradication efforts in order to have substantial decreases in coca cultivation in 2006. The GOC initiative to purchase four additional spray aircraft with USD 4.5 million from the GOC,s own budget demonstrates an unprecedented GOC commitment to increased coca spraying. End comment.
WOOD